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ABSTRACT

The involvement of process consultants can ease the development of strategies for increasing school effectiveness. The process consultant does not function as an expert in education, but facilitates development of an effective planning team consisting of the principal and four or five faculty members. The consultant first determines whether the principal and at least half the faculty will commit themselves to the intervention method. Faculty opinions concerning the presence or absence of effective school characteristics in their school are gathered next. In the most critical phase of the intervention, the planning team participates in a 2-day institute during which it analyzes these opinions to identify problems; prioritizes the problem areas; determines what causes the most important problem, whom it affects, whether it relates to school climate or to instructional organization, and what goal the problem prevents the school from attaining; uses force-field analysis to identify factors affecting achievement of the goal; develops objectives and strategies for achieving the goal; and specifies monitoring and evaluation processes. The final phases of the intervention concern obtaining faculty commitment to act on the planning team's decisions, and establishing the role of the consultant in implementing and renewing the process. (PGD)

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AN ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS INTERVENTION
FOR
EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING

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The most critical aspect of the school effectiveness process is the problem-solving institute. Prior to the institute the members of the faculty¹ have either been interviewed or they have responded to a questionnaire regarding the effective schools' characteristics, to determine the extent to which they exist in the school. These assessment data represent the opinions and perceptions of the respondees and as such are not necessarily factual. When they are tabulated they provide a "sense" of what is happening in the school, but the data must be thoroughly analyzed before any decisions about introducing changes into the operation of the school are reached. The problem-solving institute is designed to assist the school's team² to analyze their assessment data.

The institute, which normally lasts for 2 days, is organized on the basis of a six-step procedure. The team begins by carefully reviewing and analyzing the school's assessment data in order to identify the problems that have been highlighted. They decide which ones require further consideration and proceed to refine these problem statements to separate the symptoms of the problems from the underlying causes. The end result of this step is one or more (usually several) concise need statements.

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1. The term faculty as used in this context refers to all of the professional staff members of the school, including the principal.
 2. The team consists of the principal and four or five faculty members.

The refined need statements are then prioritized on the basis of their impact on the operation of the school. (Needs that cannot be dealt with by the team, like those requiring large expenditures of district funds, are noted during the previous step but are then eliminated from the list being considered.) A problem statement is formulated for the top ranked need. The problem statement responds to four questions: Who is affected by the problem? Who/What is causing the problem? What type of a problem is it? and What is the goal for improvement? This statement clearly describes the problem and the goal for improvement. As time permits the remaining need statements are translated into problem statements and cycled through the remaining steps in the procedure.

The fourth step involves the analysis of the goal for improvement using the force-field analysis technique (Lewin, 1947). The force-field procedure is used to identify the factors that will interfere with the attainment of the specified goal and those that will facilitate its achievement. Each of the forces is clarified, rated in terms of its strength and ranked in terms of its importance.

Objectives and strategies for achieving the goal are then formulated on the basis of the information obtained from the force-field analysis. The objectives are written in behavioral terms stating who will be responsible for doing what and how one will know when the desired results have been obtained.

Each objective also has a timeline for completing its strategies.

Although the evaluation criteria for the objectives are either stated or they are implicit in the statement of each objective, the final step in the procedure involves a detailed discussion of the evaluation of the effort. The purpose of this discussion is to assist the team to develop a monitoring procedure for keeping track of their activities to ensure that their objectives are being achieved or modified if necessary. The overall problem-solving process will be replicated by the faculty several times during the course of the project.

In most instances all of the needs that have been identified will not be dealt with at the institute. The team, with the assistance of an external process consultant, will complete the planning process with the total staff. This is often accomplished through large group problem-solving sessions or task forces or a combination of the two approaches.

The institute is conducted by a process consultant who functions as a facilitator for the team. It is the consultant's responsibility to manage the process during the course of the session but not to become involved in the participants' deliberations. In short, he/she doesn't function as an "expert" on school effectiveness and exercises extreme care not to influence in any way the team's decisions. The consultant guides

the ongoing discussion to ensure that the team keeps on task and doesn't overlook or misinterpret any of the data or their implications. At times the consultant may temporarily join the team through a role-play or detailed questioning, but he/she never loses sight of the ongoing process.

The process consultation approach is used because it focuses upon joint diagnosis of the client's problems, with the client making the ultimate decisions, and with the consultant developing the client's diagnostic skills (Schein, 1969). This approach to consulting is often more effective than the traditional "discipline knowledge-based expert" approach because it helps the client to recognize the problems that exist, to share in their diagnosis and to be actively involved in generating solutions rather than having the consultant handle the diagnosis and prescribe the solutions. Consequently it avoids making the client defensive and/or argumentative.

The initial contact between the process consultant and the school is made several weeks, and sometimes months before the problem-solving institute. The consultant begins by meeting with the principal to discuss in detail the school effectiveness process and its possible implications for the school. It is essential to determine if there is a realistic match between the principal's goal(s) for the project and the potential results of the process. If they do coincide the consultant will make arrangements to

meet with the faculty to discuss the effective schools program.

It is necessary to have the support of approximately 60% of the staff for the program if it is going to have a chance to succeed in the school. Therefore, care must be taken in orienting the faculty. After the initial meeting with them the consultant should be available to meet with teachers individually and/or in small groups to answer their questions or provide them with additional information before seeking their commitment. He/she might spend a day or two at the school. These meetings present an excellent opportunity for the consultant to develop some rapport with the staff.

Both the principal and at least one-half of the staff must decide to become involved in the program before the consultant will agree to go any further. Without this level of commitment from the school the success potential of the project is questionable at best. Without the commitment of the principal the program cannot be initiated.

From the time the faculty commit themselves to the school effectiveness process until the consultant terminates his/her relationship with the school, he/she should make it a point to meet with the principal and members of the staff periodically. Such meetings are particularly important prior to the assessment and the problem-solving institute. This time spent by the consultant will serve to promote communication between

him/her and the faculty and it will also help to alleviate the faculty's anxiety regarding the program to some extent.

The problem-solving institute, employing the process consultation approach, is actually an organization development intervention strategy designed to introduce change into the school in the direction of the school effectiveness characteristics. The term organization development is being used in this context as defined by French and Bell (1973):

"...a long range effort to improve an organizations's problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative management of organizational culture - with special emphasis on the culture of formal work teams - with the assistance of a change agent, or catalyst, and the use of the theory and technology of applied behavioral sciences, including action research." (p. 15)

Therefore, in addition to managing the problem-solving process which provides the overall framework for the institute the consultant must also initiate an intervention into the school's (via the team) sociotechnical system, organize the principal and his/her staff (team) members into a cohesive unit (team building) and develop their (team's) problem-solving capacity. There is no single approach/procedure or packaged program that will enable the consultant to achieve his/her goals across all teams. How he/she proceeds will depend largely on the problems identified and the personalities involved.

It is essential, however, not to allow personalities as such

to enter into the discussions that take place. If this does happen the risk of turning constructive conflict into interpersonal conflict is great! Destructive conflict is a roadblock to problem-solving and it generally ends in loss (Filley, 1975). The consultant should continuously strive to channel conflict into problem-solving situations.

Two basic types of problems are usually identified by the effective schools' assessment: those related to the climate within the school and those related to the organization of the school for instruction. The climate of a school is made up of several elements; the communication flow, motivational conditions, technological readiness, lower level influence, decision-making practices and human resources primacy (Taylor & Bowers, 1972). Climate problems are the more serious ones and they are often difficult to deal with. When there is a problem with some aspect of the school's climate it may prevent any other changes from being introduced until it is dealt with. For example, if there is a communication breakdown between the principal and his/her staff, or among the members of the staff, depending on how serious the breakdown is of course, it is not likely that they will be able to successfully modify existing programs or introduce new ones into the school:

A lack of communication often promotes an atmosphere of mistrust which in turn eliminates the possibility for

cooperation among the parties involved/effectuated. Therefore, until the principal and his/her staff acknowledge the existence of the communication problem, assume responsibility for it and decide to address it they are probably not going to be very effective in modifying existing programs or in introducing new projects. The same forecast holds true for other difficulties related to the school's climate.

Sometimes climate problems are so obvious the faculty can't help but recognize them. (They may also want to deal with them but often they don't know how to go about doing it or they are unable to work on the problem by themselves.) Unfortunately, things are not always clear cut. In many instances no one wants to acknowledge a climate problem because no one wants to "own it". These types of problems are frequently highly sensitive ones which involve people's egos (e.g., a principal who is unable to function as a leader) and consequently, tend to make them defensive. When this does occur a segment of or the total institute may end up being a T-Group (sensitivity) session, where feelings and emotions are dealt with. (Even under these circumstances personalities are not allowed to be introduced into the discussion. To do so would only serve to upset people more and thereby further obscure the underlying cause(s) of the problems by confusing them with the symptoms.)

The other type of problems (organization for instruction) stem directly from the remaining effective schools characteristics

(e.g., student expectations, time-on-task, etc.). These kinds of needs are more readily identified and dealt with because they are often more apparent and also because they ordinarily don't involve the direct personal interactions that climate problems do. Solutions to difficulties with the school's procedure for monitoring student progress in basic skills, or even the development of a new monitoring system, don't usually evoke the emotionally charged, defensive types of responses that resolving a communication or leadership style problem does. (Not if the problem is actually one related to monitoring student progress rather than a communication or leadership style problem of which inadequate student progress monitoring is a symptom.)

The foregoing discussion is not meant to imply that the non-climate related effective schools' characteristics are of lesser significance than the school's climate. This quite obviously is not true! Once again what is true, however, is that if one or more aspects of the climate are causing serious problems the probability of the faculty dealing effectively with the other characteristics isn't very high. (Examples to support this assumption have already been presented earlier in this paper.)

The follow-up, or re-entry of the school effectiveness team back into the faculty is the final phase of the intervention

initiated by the institute. Re-entry is almost as critical to the success of the total effort as the institute itself. If the team has succeeded in clarifying the needs identified by the assessment and formulating a plan of action to deal with at least two or three of the most critical ones (usually all of the clarified needs will not be dealt with because of time limitations), then the problem-solving institute has partially achieved its purpose. The institute, and hence the team, will not be truly successful until the remainder of the staff has at least to some extent "bought into" the work that their colleagues have done.

Re-entry is often the most difficult phase in the process. To begin with, all of the staff members are not equally enthusiastic about the school effectiveness project. Some of them may have little or no interest in it. Since only a few people have been involved in the institute, the remainder of the staff has not experienced the process in action directly and does not share the euphoric feeling that often results from intensive group sessions. Therefore, when the team returns from the institute their colleagues will be curious, possibly even skeptical, but they will not perceive things any differently than they did prior to the institute. Although the team can discuss what happened at the session, it is difficult for them to convey the intensity of their experience and the changes that have taken place in their perceptions and attitudes.

The team must carefully plan their re-entry strategy or the entire effort can "washout" at this stage. It is advisable to have the process consultant work with the team on the re-entry phase. He/she should attend the initial session, which is ordinarily a faculty meeting, to support the team's re-entry. He/she should not take an active role in this meeting unless the team experiences extreme difficulty with the staff, and then only in a form previously agreed upon by the team. The problems dealt with at the institute belong to the faculty (including the team)-not the consultant. Consequently, if he/she does find it necessary to intervene with the faculty at this meeting he/she must do no more than move the group beyond the "rough spot(s)", otherwise the team may lose their creditability and thereby damage the effort immeasurably.

How does a team successfully achieve re-entry? This is a difficult question to answer definitively because each re-entry situation is unique. Unfortunately, there is no standard approach which is suitable for all occasions. As rules of thumb, however, some general guidelines might prove to be helpful. Present the problems identified and the process used to deal with them clearly and succinctly to the staff. Don't hold information back but be careful not to overburden them with tedious descriptions of what took place at the institute. Present the rationale (evidence/data) used to support the

decisions that were made. Discuss the clarified need statements and the plan for dealing with them that was formulated. Be prepared to modify the statements and/or the plan as the situation warrants. (Remember the problems identified belong to everyone, not solely to the team.) And finally, agree upon the next step or steps to be taken as a total faculty. Never, never conclude the re-entry meeting without achieving some level of consensus and closure.

The final phase in the overall process is to determine the nature and the extent of the continuing relationship between the process consultant and the school's faculty. At this point in the process the consultant should assume the role of support system to the team and possibly to the faculty. This role will vary from school to school depending on the problems involved and the rapport of the consultant with the team. (If the consultant is not accepted and trusted by the team following the problem-solving institute he/she should terminate his/her relationship with the school.) In jointly defining the consultant's role questions such as the following should be considered. How difficult will it be for the faculty to deal with their problems? Can they do it without outside help? What is the faculty's reaction to the continuing assistance of the consultant? How much time does the school need from the consultant for follow-up assistance? How much time can the consultant make available? To what extent should the consultant become directly involved in the project? How and when

will the consultant be phased out of the school's project?

It can safely be assumed that the faculty needs, wants and probably appreciates the help of an outside consultant if that assistance is constructive to their purpose(s). After all, if they didn't feel this way they would not have become involved in the school effectiveness program to begin with. Since many organizations don't have a good sense of how best to use an external consultant, particularly a process consultant, he/she may have to help them (not tell them) with the decisions regarding his/her role. Above all, the consultant should not leave a school totally on its own before it is ready to maintain its school effectiveness project, nor should he/she be over-protective. A good consultant will work himself/herself out of a relationship as soon as the client has developed the ability to deal effectively with problem-solving and is capable of managing the effort without external help. (See Figure 1.)

Process Consultant-Client Relationship

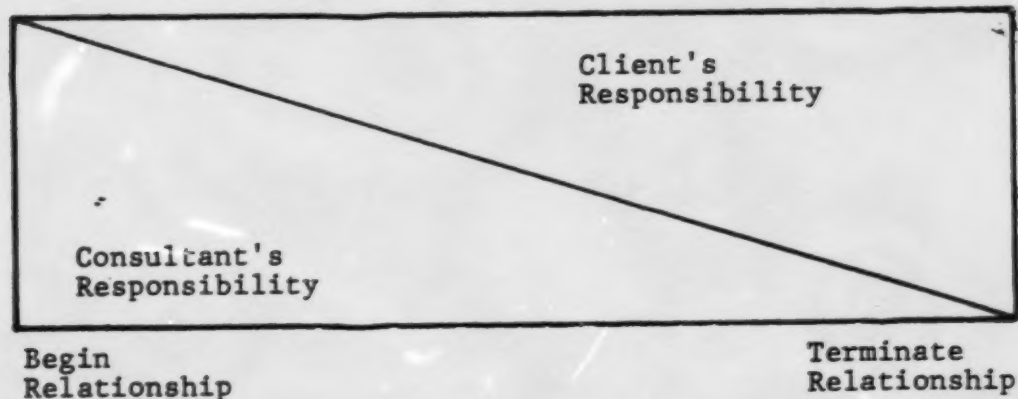


Figure 1

If the effective schools project is going to succeed in a school the process consultant must strive to develop the team's problem-solving capacity. The school effectiveness process is a long-range effort. If the staff, under the guidance of the team, is able to continuously renew their efforts, then there is a strong probability that the project will be integrated into the ongoing activities of the school. If the staff fails to develop the necessary problem-solving and renewal capacity the effort will have limited success at best. The problem-solving institute, re-entry and the consultant's follow-up are critical elements in the success of the effective schools program in a school.

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